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Culture of peace

Promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report provides an overview of the activities carried out by the main United Nations entities working in the areas of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace since the most recent consideration of the matter by the General Assembly. It concludes with areas where the United Nations system is expected to strengthen its capacity in order to tackle the increasingly complex challenges that the world is facing.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 69/139 and 69/140. This is the second time that a combined report has been submitted on the implementation of the two resolutions by the United Nations system. Having a true system-wide response to the implementation of these resolutions requires a shared commitment and the collective efforts of a wide range of United Nations entities. In that spirit, the contributions received outline the work that United Nations entities have done to create a culture of peace or engage in interreligious and intercultural dialogue, either as part of their mandate or in conjunction with it. The present report is also to be read in conjunction with resolution 68/127, entitled "A world against violence and violent extremism", adopted by the Assembly in 2013 under the agenda item entitled "Culture of peace". Some of the activities described herein are of direct relevance to some of the provisions of that resolution.

2. Building a culture of peace and non-violence and fostering the reconciliation of cultures are efforts as broad in scope as they are ambitious in vision. Global trends in migration, media, trade, tourism, urbanization, climate change and new technology are bringing people together at an ever-increasing intensity and speed, and are expected to continue well into the foreseeable future. The magnitude of the transformations and the scope of new ideas have given rise to new opportunities and tools for advancing mutual understanding and respect. At the same time, however, our societies remain beset by inequality, prejudice, intolerance and conflict. Moreover, means of communications such as the Internet that are bringing people closer together are often being seized upon as vehicles for divisiveness and incitement to hatred and violence.

3. Establishing peace through dialogue constitutes a necessary foundation for the stability of our societies, and this, in turn, enables them to flourish. Without peace, development is not possible. In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, establishing an environment conducive to peace is a prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development. Proposed sustainable development goal 16 on the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies provides for specific targets to be reached that are aimed at reducing violence, strengthening institutions and improving decision-making processes. In this context, promoting a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue across and within our societies has never been so crucial.

II. Leading role of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in the implementation of the programme of action for a culture of peace and non-violence and the Action Plan for the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures

4. As the United Nations agency entrusted with leading the implementation of the programme of action for a culture of peace and non-violence and the Action Plan for the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) remains committed to accelerating progress in this field. During the reporting

period, its role evolved, shaped by the global context and instilled with fresh impetus through the adoption of the UNESCO midterm strategy for 2014-2021, in which the vital importance of intercultural dialogue is highlighted.[1]

5. In this capacity, the role of UNESCO is twofold: at the global level, to catalyse and coordinate initiatives and to lend support to the international community; and at the national level, to establish targeted and intersectoral programming across the its mandate. Following the General Assembly's endorsement of the Action Plan for the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures in resolution 69/140, UNESCO scaled up its activities, guided by the four broad priority areas of the action plan and in cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders, including member States, National Commissions for UNESCO, United Nations agencies, goodwill ambassadors and UNESCO artists for peace, UNESCO Chairs and associated schools, clubs and centres, academic institutions and civil society at large.

6. The two global UNESCO priorities, Africa and gender equality, have underpinned the agency's activities in supporting a culture of peace and the Decade. Promoting a culture of peace and non-violence was identified as a flagship programme of the operational strategy for the Africa priority for 2014-2021. Regional initiatives have been introduced, such as an African initiative on education for peace and development through interreligious and intercultural dialogue, launched in Cotonou, Benin, in May 2015, and a pan-African forum on the theme "African youth and the challenge of the promotion of a culture of peace in Africa", organized jointly by UNESCO, the Omar Bongo Ondimba Foundation for Peace, Science, Culture and the Environment and the Gabonese National Commission for UNESCO, held in Libreville, in December 2014. The forum also served to launch the "Youth and Culture of Peace" network, through which the Foundation awards an international prize for youth organizations, and to strengthen partnerships between UNESCO and the Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative.

7. UNESCO has worked to boost gender equality and women's empowerment through targeted and joint programming and inter-agency collaboration. It has worked with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in co-leading post-2015 dialogues on culture and development. Gender equality was one of the six sub-themes. In the Pacific, culture's role as a positive force in combating gender-based violence was the driving force behind a project on women's empowerment for a culture of peace and non-violence in the Pacific, which was rolled out in 2013 and 2014 and reinforced through an advocacy network to promote a human-rights based approach, as part of the "Delivering as one" initiative with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and UNDP.

A. Promoting mutual understanding and reciprocal knowledge of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity as well as supporting reconciliation efforts

8. UNESCO builds its programming on the principle that cultures are heterogeneous and dynamic. This guides the work of UNESCO towards deepening knowledge about one's culture and those of others, including history, language,

[1] Available from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002278/227860e.pdf.

heritage, religion and beliefs, in order to develop mutual understanding and respect. In this regard, the Baku Process, initiated under the leadership of the Government of Azerbaijan, continued to provide a large-scale platform for the exchange of knowledge on interreligious and intercultural dialogue. As an integral part of this process, the third World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, on the theme "Sharing culture for shared security", held in Baku in May 2015, brought together more than 500 participants from over 100 countries, including 35 UNESCO Chairs specialized in intercultural and interreligious dialogue, to identify challenges and strengthen future cooperation among key actors.

9. The escalation of the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage is part of a strategy of cultural cleansing, as underlined by the UNESCO Director-General. That it constitutes a war crime has underscored the urgent need to protect culture and better integrate the cultural dimension into security, conflict resolution and humanitarian aid processes. The response by UNESCO has been focused on cooperation with various actors in heritage reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts, such as mobilizing a wide range of technical and financial partners in the reconstruction of the damaged mausoleums of Timbuktu in Mali, which are on the List of World Heritage in Danger. Reconstruction efforts at the site began in March 2014. The "Unite4Heritage" campaign launched by UNESCO in March 2015 broadened global support for the protection of heritage threatened by sectarianism and extreme violence. The adoption of Security Council resolution 2199 (2015) has clearly highlighted that the safeguarding of cultural heritage in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic is a security and political imperative.

10. Several UNESCO programmes have continued to broaden the knowledge and mutual understanding of cultures and of the ways in which they have evolved over time to the present day. The UNESCO Silk Road online platform for dialogue, diversity and development has revived and extended the historic networks of the silk roads into the digital space, opening up access to rich scholarship on the diversity and interdependency of these routes. An international network of focal points met for the first time in Xi'an, China, in May 2015. Promoting shared memory through the writing and teaching of history has driven further work in elaborating the UNESCO General and Regional Histories initiative on the themes of humanity, Africa, Central Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Islamic culture, among others. A UNESCO conference held in Bangkok in September 2014 embodied the first steps towards extending the scope of the initiative to South-East Asia in order to develop shared historical narratives and support the reconciliation of national accounts through teaching and learning materials in the subregion.

11. Supporting the dialogue between history and memory can be a way to foster a holistic and pluralistic vision of the tragedies of history and their consequences and to move forward together in reconciliation. UNESCO organized several activities on 21 January 2015, ahead of the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, 70 years after the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and strengthened its work in education for Holocaust remembrance by launching a regional network in Latin America in 2014 and partnering with the Aladdin Project to organize a series of international conferences in Asia and Africa throughout 2015.

12. By exploring the issue of violence in history, UNESCO has leveraged culture as a bridge-builder to promote more effective and inclusive reconciliation processes and global solidarity. In 2014, the Slave Route Project, on the theme of "Resistance,

liberty, heritage", celebrated its twentieth anniversary with a large-scale event held at UNESCO headquarters, bringing together over 1,500 participants, and more than 50 events were organized by partner institutions around the world. Specific links are also being established between the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022) and the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024), under the theme "Recognition, justice and development", in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

B. Building a framework for commonly shared values to foster social cohesion

13. Upholding human rights and creating peaceful social cohesion have long been at the heart of the work of UNESCO, as enshrined in a series of normative instruments that provide member States with a consolidated framework for engaging in dialogue and cooperation.

14. The critical role of different authorities and expertise in shaping a more just society was vividly brought to the fore in *Agree to Differ*,[2] which was published in May 2015 in partnership with Tudor Rose. The compendium features perspectives from a wide range of actors and contributes to a wider dissemination of the underlying principles of intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

15. Promoting cooperation with religious institutions and leaders can have a profound influence on strengthening dialogue among peoples, as evidenced through various forums and targeted programming. UNESCO contributed to efforts to build dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding between the leaders and followers of world and traditional religions as part of the fifth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, held in Astana in June 2015.

16. The UNESCO Participation Programme remained a strategic framework for member States and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in official partnership with UNESCO to implement targeted initiatives at the national and regional levels. In 2014 and 2015, more than 25 projects with a direct connection to fostering a culture of peace and non-violence were funded. UNESCO further promoted partnerships with NGOs, including through initiatives such as the fifth International Forum of NGOs, on the theme "Rapprochement of cultures: one humanity beyond diversity", held in Beijing in July 2015. The Euro-Arab dialogue initiative led by national commissions for UNESCO since 2001 is proposing that the second international Euro-Arab meeting be held in 2016, with the support of the MBI Al Jaber Foundation and regional coordinators from Oman and Poland.

17. Some youth platforms and frameworks have demonstrated positive results in fostering social cohesion at the regional level. For example, the Networks of Mediterranean Youth, funded by the European Union, is being implemented in 10 countries of the Mediterranean and helps young women and men to develop capacity in policy analysis and design, exercise their rights and engage as active citizens to overcome marginalization with tangible skills, tools and knowledge. By the end of 2014, more than 1,000 representatives of youth organizations had

[2] Available from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002326/232657e.pdf.

received training, seven networks had been established, and five research and mapping initiatives of youth online platforms and online behaviour were under way.

18. UNESCO continued to work with municipal authorities to improve policies and create initiatives in tackling racism, discrimination and xenophobia by piloting the International Coalition of Cities against Racism, which mobilizes its current membership of more than 500 cities around the world on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, on 21 March.

C. Disseminating the principles and tools of intercultural dialogue through high-quality education and the media

19. UNESCO seeks to not only widen the horizon of opportunities by creating spaces for dialogue and cooperation, but also equip individuals with vital intercultural competencies based on shared values, understanding, empathy, respect and trust. Intercultural competencies consist of a combination of knowledge, attitudes and skills that deepen understanding of the self and the other in order to forge meaningful bonds across divides and collectively identify solutions for societal well-being and sustainability. The King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Programme for a Culture of Peace and Dialogue continued to strengthen the cooperation between UNESCO and Saudi Arabia in promoting a culture of peace and advancing the objectives of the Decade. In the second phase of the Programme, 10 projects were launched in 2014 to instil and scale up dialogue-based intercultural skills and competencies, including by developing university curricula, utilizing media and information and communications technology for capacity-building and online training, spearheading awareness-raising campaigns for learning to live together, mobilizing youth organizations and networks, and revising school textbooks to counter stereotypes. As part of a Danish-funded project on building competencies to develop policies and programmes for intercultural dialogue respectful of human rights, UNESCO also developed specific tools, such as the *From Words to Action* portfolio, published in 2014 on Human Rights Day, 10 December.

20. Education provides the vital tools for nurturing the competencies of tomorrow's global citizens: the aptitude to understand others, empathize, think critically and exchange ideas peacefully. Teaching the values of respect, tolerance and solidarity are central goals that underpin the work of UNESCO in promoting high-quality education for all and its leadership of the Secretary-General's Global Education First Initiative across the world. In its role as the lead United Nations agency for education for sustainable development, UNESCO provided technical support to member States to empower learners to take informed decisions aimed at environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, which had resulted in 365 commitments for action by stakeholders in 80 countries by the end of 2014.

21. In the context of the global citizenship education programme, a second forum entitled "Building peaceful and sustainable societies: preparing for post-2015" was held in January 2015. From 2013 to 2015, a clearing house was launched and more than a dozen partnerships were developed to equip learners with practical skills and lifelong critical thinking skills. Tackling discrimination and violence in and through education was the core focus of the development of "Teaching respect for all" pedagogical tools. A related implementation guide outlining key principles for

policymakers, actions for schools and materials for educators was successfully piloted in 2014 in Brazil, Côte d'Ivoire, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya and South Africa.

22. The Internet has shaped and transformed all areas of contemporary life, providing new channels and opportunities for building inclusive knowledge societies. Similarly, gated communities and virtual communication have arisen that can lead to isolation, marginalization and, in more extreme cases, the incitement of hate speech and violence. This growing concern points to the need for new skills in media and cultural literacy, in particular for young people, to support positive and meaningful opportunities for self-affirmation, engagement and solidarity. In this context, UNESCO organized an international conference on the theme "Youth and the Internet: fighting radicalization and extremism", held at UNESCO headquarters in June 2015, which brought together more than 240 participants from 70 countries to share policy measures on reducing the use of the Internet as a tool for fomenting extremism and radicalism among young people. On this occasion, UNESCO launched a new, integrated multi-stakeholder project, entitled "Framework of action — empowering youth to build peace", which supports young people in building new forms of global solidarity, including online, and countering radicalization and violent extremism. Activities will be based around four main axes targeting policy-relevant research, online communities, media cooperation, and media campaigns and outreach, to be implemented mainly at the national and local levels until December 2017.

23. The potential of the media was also highlighted at a global media forum on the theme "The role of media in realizing the future we want for all", which was co-organized by UNESCO and the Government of Indonesia and held in Bali in August 2014. The forum concluded with the launch of a road map on the subject and a call for strengthened media literacy and freedom of expression to combat messages of hatred. A publication entitled "Media in support of sustainable development and a culture of peace" was subsequently issued in follow-up to the forum.

24. The work of UNESCO on media and information literacy and intercultural dialogue also merits attention in this context. Since its launch in 2011 through a partnership between UNESCO and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, the initiative on media and information literacy and intercultural dialogue has brought together 21 member universities from different regions around the world to promote media- and information-literate societies and mutual understanding among cultures.

D. Fostering dialogue for sustainable development and its ethical, social and cultural dimensions

25. Dialogue based on the practice of mutual respect and tolerance and a commitment to non-violence and reconciliation remain essential features for sustainable development. At its June 2015 session, the Intergovernmental Council of the Management of Social Transformations programme agreed upon further actions to foster social inclusion in view of the post-2015 development agenda.

26. Traditional and indigenous knowledge can play a key role in strengthening inclusive societies and peacebuilding efforts and is a rich repository of innovation and coping strategies for community-based resilience to natural disasters and climate change. The crucial importance of traditional and indigenous knowledge to

sustainable development was central to discussions at the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, held in September 2014 in Samoa, and was reiterated at the World Science Day for Peace and Development, celebrated on 10 November 2014 under the theme "Quality science education: ensuring a sustainable future for all".

III. United Nations system activities in support of the culture of peace and dialogue

A. Activities carried out to promote peaceful and inclusive societies

27. Through youth-targeted activities, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations promotes interreligious and intercultural dialogue as part of a long-term vision to build a culture of peace that will continue to strengthen over multiple generations. Its Youth Solidarity Fund provided seed funding to youth-led civil society projects to facilitate intergenerational dialogue and empower youth voices in political processes, especially in conflict-prone environments. The 2014 Alliance's summer school in New York brought together more than 75 young people from around the world to engage in peace education training and exposure to the United Nations, thus providing them with the tools to make positive change in their communities and participate in global dialogues.

28. As part of the partnership between the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and UNDP, the PEACEapp competition encouraged positive interactions between young people and social media platforms, as did the PLURAL+ festival, which came about as a result of a partnership between the Alliance and the International Organization for Migration. The broad range of the projects submitted to these initiatives demonstrates the untapped potential of new forms of technology to create dynamic spaces for intercultural dialogue and story-sharing and to overcome stereotypes. The Alliance has also focused on developing youth media literacy skills and media products to provide platforms for open discussions on relevant topics. In September 2014, the Alliance convened the first in a series of workshops with Somali diaspora journalists to teach non-biased approaches to reporting on conflict in Somalia and to diaspora populations. Media activities were also carried out with the dual objective of promoting diversity in the newsroom and opening up access to professional opportunities for young people. The Alliance continued to boost youth socioeconomic development through the Entrepreneurs for Social Change project, which trains and mentors young social entrepreneurs from the Euro-Mediterranean region.

29. The Intercultural Innovation Award of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, awarded to more than 30 grass-roots civil society initiatives to date, recognizes and supports innovative approaches favouring intercultural dialogues and promoting understanding, cooperation and the culture of peace. During the reporting period, many of these initiatives scaled up their activities in various communities and countries, which had a direct impact on a number of beneficiaries.

30. UNDP increasingly supports national actors in efforts to achieve peaceful and inclusive solutions in situations characterized by prolonged periods of tension. Over the past five years, UNDP has provided support in Fiji, Ghana, Guatemala, Guyana, Kenya, Lebanon, Malawi, Nepal, Togo and Tunisia. Since 2010, UNDP has

supported the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda and the country's Elder's Forum, which has anchored new conflict prevention architecture in Uganda for mediating issues that could precipitate tensions.

31. In response to the violence and escalating inter-ethnic tension that followed the regime change in Kyrgyzstan in April 2010, UNDP has provided critical support for the development of conflict management architecture. In 2014, it worked with the Government and civil society to consolidate local and national peace councils to act as mediators and facilitators on contentious issues and analyse conflict trends. In addition, UNDP has increasingly played an intermediary role in support of nationally led peace processes, such as in Colombia and the Philippines.

32. Interreligious and intercultural dialogue is critical in peacebuilding efforts. In line with its mandate, the Peacebuilding Support Office engages in various activities aimed at strengthening communities and stabilizing local and national governments, supports the Peacebuilding Commission and administers the Peacebuilding Fund. At the national level, the Office partners with civil society organizations, Governments, women's groups, United Nations agencies and other organizations to develop, fund and implement programmes aimed at mitigating intercultural hostilities. In 2014, it supported efforts in 18 Member States, including 26 projects to foster reconciliation and another 25 projects to strengthen political dialogue.

33. In Liberia, the Peacebuilding Commission continued to advocate increased dialogue between the State and civil society to strengthen trust and confidence, notably during the Ebola virus disease outbreak, and boosted civil society participation through the implementation of the Government's reconciliation road map. In consultation with the Peacebuilding Commission, the Peacebuilding Support Office approved a third allocation of $11.65 million to United Nations entities in Burundi, a third of which will support political dialogue and social cohesion, youth participation in political and socioeconomic life, human rights and the resolution of land disputes.

34. The Peacebuilding Fund supported reconciliation efforts in several countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Central African Republic, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Myanmar and Somalia. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, it promoted reconciliation through the strengthening of ties between the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and civil society and mitigating the spread of conflict through income-generating activities. In 2014, it supported a national dialogue conference and launched a constitutional drafting process in Yemen. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its partners revised the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy to better support the Government's programme for the reconstruction of areas of armed conflict in the east of the country.

35. UNESCO, UNDP and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) partnered in implementing the Peacebuilding Fund project entitled "Dialogue for the future: promoting coexistence and diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina", to enhance spaces for dialogue based on trust and respect and create stronger synergies between the Government and civil society, thus providing new vantage points in exploring top-down and bottom-up decision-making processes. On the occasion of the first conference of the project, in April 2015, a dialogue platform was launched and a

dialogue platform declaration was signed by the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the United Nations Resident Coordinator.

36. UN-Women has remained committed to ensuring that women are key actors in advancing the culture of peace, as increasingly recognized in various normative instruments and Security Council resolutions. For example, in Burundi, it established a women's network for peace and dialogue to enhance women's involvement and leadership. In the context of the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was celebrated in 2015, review processes have constituted an opportunity to affirm women's full participation as essential to the realization of lasting peace. Several notable achievements were observed. For example, in Guatemala, UN-Women supported consultations among diverse civil society groups; and indigenous women participated for the first time in the national and regional review process, providing visibility for their needs and enhancing dialogue with feminist movements.

37. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) is working to secure HIV services and reduce the vulnerabilities of women in conflict, post-conflict and fragile environments. It has engaged the military, police officers, peacekeepers and faith leaders as agents for change in reducing the risks of HIV transmission among civilians and combatants. UNAIDS has also addressed the issue of sexual and gender-based violence by taking steps to protect vulnerable women and girls in the event of abuse by ensuring access to post-exposure prophylaxis.

38. The United Nations Institute for Training and Research continued its work in fostering a culture of peace through training and knowledge-sharing seminars to strengthen capacity in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Some of its programmes focused on examining the root causes of conflict and promoted the recognition of difference as a positive engine for development rather than as a source of dispute.

39. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the World Tourism Organization asserts that tourism can be a vehicle for cultural dialogue and mutual understanding and a vital force for peace and a factor of friendship and understanding among the peoples of the world. In 2014, it partnered with the University of Klagenfurt in Austria to produce the *International Handbook on Tourism and Peace* to enhance understanding of the intrinsic relationship between the tourism sector and global peacebuilding efforts.

40. During the reporting period, the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat deployed its many communications tools and assets, including its multilingual news platforms and social media accounts, to promote issues relating to intercultural and interreligious dialogue and understanding. The Department ensured that the high-level General Assembly thematic debate on the theme "Promoting tolerance and reconciliation: fostering peaceful, inclusive societies and countering violent extremism", held in April 2015, was covered by United Nations media. This included multimedia features to spotlight the issue of how some young people are attracted to extremist violence and a video dedicated to the event that was widely disseminated in different languages and through social media platforms. United Nations news and social media platforms also reported on the commemoration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the start of the First World War, Nelson Mandela International Day and the International Day of Peace. These efforts were supported

by dedicated websites in all six official languages. In the case of the International Day of Peace (21 September), more than 40 separate events were held worldwide through United Nations information centres and services, including lectures, seminars, public events, a film screening and marches. The Department also raised awareness about the first-ever officially observed International Day of Yoga, on 21 June 2015, under the theme "Yoga for harmony and peace", through a dedicated website in the six official languages and a highly successful social media campaign.

B. Activities carried out in connection with counter-terrorism and violent extremism

41. With a view to promoting tolerance, respect and understanding among peoples, the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy emphasizes that intercultural and interreligious dialogue are elements vital to combating terrorism. The Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force supported several UNESCO-led activities to counter the appeal of terrorism and violent extremism. In Burkina Faso, it promoted peace education and the social inclusion of vulnerable communities and, in Nigeria, it worked with women, young people, traditional and religious leaders to highlight the role of education in promoting interreligious and inter-ethnic dialogue and cross-cultural understanding to prevent radicalization.

42. Discussions on implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia during the period 2013-2016 have reflected an emerging consensus on the need to address the institutionalization of dialogue in order to promote interfaith exchange and prevent disinformation that could lead to radicalization. Similarly, there has been a call to boost the capacity and involvement of religious leaders and institutions in mediation, identifying the risk of conflict, managing and resolving conflicts, and preventing extremism.

43. The Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter-terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, as part of their work in countering terrorism and violent extremism, have paid close attention to measures taken by Member States to enhance dialogue and broaden understanding among civilizations. The work of the CTED in this area derives from the mandate given to them by Security Council resolution 1624 (2005), which addresses the threat of terrorist incitement, as well as mandates from later Security Council resolutions on threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.

44. In its work to promote greater efforts on dialogue and understanding, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate has maintained close cooperation with relevant actors, including Member States, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and civil society organizations, such as Religions for Peace. Since 2011, it has facilitated regional and national workshops on resolution 1624 (2005), which have included components on interreligious dialogue and understanding. A national workshop conducted in Kenya in January 2015, for example, stressed the need for enhanced dialogue among religions and cultures in the context of countering violent extremism. In December 2014, the Directorate participated in a meeting held in Abu Dhabi and organized by Religions for Peace and the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, at which a statement was

issued that rejected violent religious extremism and advanced an action plan aimed at increasing tolerance and understanding.

45. The work of the Committee and the Directorate has also taken into account the mandates given by the Security Council on the issue of the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters. In its resolution 2178 (2014), the Council stressed that countering violent extremism was essential to addressing the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters, and it encouraged States to empower religious leaders in developing strategies to counter the violent extremist narrative.

C. Activities carried out in relation to environmental protection

46. On the basis of its work in more than 20 conflict-affected countries, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has taken steps towards establishing a new interdisciplinary field of environmental peacebuilding, encompassing preventive, resolution and recovery efforts relating to violent conflicts around natural resources. Given that at least 40 per cent of all internal armed conflicts have a link to natural resources, work in this area is vital to building and sustaining a culture of peace.

47. UNEP works regionally and globally to promote environmental peacebuilding and partners with faith-based organizations, NGOs and other United Nations entities. It launched an environmental peacebuilding knowledge platform that acts as a space to exchange information and best practices and broker South-South technical cooperation. More than 2,400 participants from over 80 countries have contributed to the platform.

48. The Arab High-Level Forum on Sustainable Development, co-organized by UNEP and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and held in Bahrain in May 2015, emphasized peace and security as a prerequisite to achieving sustainable development. As part of its regional work in Latin America and the Caribbean, UNEP empowered young people to generate peace among members of different communities through targeted activities as part of commemorative days and United Nations global events.

49. In Darfur, UNEP demonstrated that dialogue on the issue of water could act as the basis for rebuilding a relationship of trust between actors and the local government. The UNEP report, *Relationships and resources: environmental governance for peacebuilding and resilient livelihoods in Sudan*, is a seminal work in the promotion of intercultural dialogue. In Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the joint management of transboundary natural resources was an instrumental step towards the resolution of binational environmental and social conflicts, as reflected in the 18-month assessment by UNEP and the report entitled "Haiti-Dominican Republic: environmental challenges in the border zone", produced in collaboration with UNDP and the World Food Programme.

50. The UNEP project on ecosystems management for productive landscapes promotes the landscape approach with respect to biodiversity conservation, energy, food and water security. This is exemplified in the promotion of sustainable pastoralism, which brings together local and subnational level planning processes to help to mitigate conflict between neighbouring resource users, in particular ethnic groups that favour different land management practices.

51. Similarly, UNEP has collaborated with partners in producing support materials, such as a guide on natural resources and conflicts in partnership with the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat, a report on women's political and economic empowerment with UN-Women, the Peacebuilding Support Office and UNDP, and a faith-based "Environment for sustainable development" toolkit for Kenya in cooperation with the Kenya Organization for Environmental Education and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation.

D. Activities focused on a rights-based approach to peace and intercultural dialogue

52. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights organized several events in the Middle East and North Africa region to strengthen the implementation of the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. The events also served as a springboard for civil society organizations from the region to generate their own initiatives. For example, the Arab civil society coalition against incitement to hatred created a regional network of civil society organizations to monitor, denounce and remedy incidents of incitement to hatred.

53. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in cooperation with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the Alliance of Iraqi Minorities convened the first conference on the promotion and protection of the rights of Iraq's diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic communities, held in Baghdad in March 2014. The conference concluded with a declaration of principles on the rights and protections for those communities, and a road map to ensure their protection from violence and equal participation in public life.

54. Following two reports of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights on the issue of historical and memorial narratives in divided societies, a panel discussion on teaching history and memorialization processes was held during the twenty-seventh session of the Human Rights Council. Panellists underlined the fact that history was neither a religion nor a single truth, and that a diverse range of history textbooks and resources should be made available to teachers and students to encourage analytical learning, critical thinking and debate. History must be approached as a science and academic discipline with a methodology, and academic freedom should be respected and protected as a way to eradicate the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and to counter cultural relativism and denial. Respect for and protection of artistic freedom was also emphasized, as artistic events and manifestations could allow people to express their narrative.

IV. Promoting interreligious dialogue through cooperation with faith-based organizations

55. A notable trend during the reporting period was increased cooperation between United Nations entities, faith-based organizations and religious leaders. Faith-based organizations and religious leaders often occupy strategic positions in local communities, allowing them to mobilize grass-roots support, earn the trust of

vulnerable groups and influence cultural norms, thus making them important stakeholders in development and peace mediation efforts.

56. In various regions and countries, UNFPA partnered with faith-based organizations and indigenous people's organizations to ensure a culturally sensitive component to its human-rights-based approach. The focus of the work is to promote the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents and young people, reduce maternal mortality, increase the quality and accessibility of family planning, combat gender-based violence and eliminate harmful practices, including female genital mutilation.

57. In its capacity as the convenor and Chair of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-based Organizations for the Millennium Development Goals, UNFPA continued to facilitate United Nations system-wide staff trainings on religion, development and humanitarian work provided under the auspices of the United Nations System Staff College. For example, in Morocco, it supported the Rabita Mohammadia des Ouléma in adapting a toolkit and organizing training of trainers, targeting 70 religious leaders across the country who, in turn, trained 550 local male and female religious leaders. UNFPA also partnered with UNAIDS to convene religious leaders and faith-based organizations from around the world during the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly, in 2014, to issue a call to action, decrying any harm to adolescent girls and boys, young people and women in the name of religion or tradition.

58. UNFPA worked with the Latin American Council of Churches to develop training processes with youth and religious leaders on sexual and reproductive health and the right to a life free of gender-based violence. In Honduras, UNFPA has been working with indigenous groups on sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence, with a focus on building the capacity of adolescent and youth populations through training and participation in establishing youth-friendly health services and access to justice services.

59. UNFPA mobilized faith-based leaders from 13 countries in East and Southern Africa to strengthen interfaith commitments to sexual and reproductive health programming and to work with men and boys towards transforming social norms in support of gender equality and maternal health. As a result of UNFPA efforts towards the elimination of female genital mutilation, in Kenya, cultural and religious leaders made public declarations on the abandonment of female genital mutilation, and more than 5,000 girls underwent alternative rites of passage and are being encouraged to go to school. In Somalia, UNFPA trained up to 3,130 female lawyers and religious leaders as champions of abandoning of all forms of female genital mutilation.

60. Working with faith-based organizations and religious leaders is especially crucial where governance structures are weak and fail to ensure human rights and administer basic services. In that context, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has explored practical ways in which faith-based organizations can help it protect and assist refugees, asylum seekers and the internally displaced. UNHCR launched new guidance for its staff, in a document entitled "Partnership note on faith-based organizations, local faith communities, and faith leaders". These efforts were complemented by a survey that compiled 50 good practice examples of activities undertaken in partnership with faith actors. UNHCR

also contributes to evaluating the role of local faith communities in promoting resilience in humanitarian and disaster situations.

61. UNHCR has sought to encourage interfaith partnerships among its leading faith-based partners. For example, joint pilot projects between Islamic Relief Worldwide and the Lutheran World Federation were established following an interfaith workshop co-organized by the Federation and the Humanitarian Forum. UNHCR has also developed specific guidance for faith leaders in order to establish principles as points of departure for dialogue and cooperation among faith actors and to promote tolerance of and respect for the world's forcibly displaced. In this regard, the Office partnered with a coalition of faith-based organizations to draft the document entitled "Affirmation of welcome", consisting of 16 affirmations. Since its launch in 2013, the document has been signed and endorsed by some 1,700 religious leaders and members of faith communities.

62. Faith-based organizations and religious leaders not only provide development actors with links to beneficiary communities, but also play a crucial role in ensuring development impact and sustainability. In line with this view, in 2015, UNDP adopted guidelines on engaging with faith-based organizations and religious leaders as part of the action plan of the 2012 UNDP Strategy on Civil Society and Civil Engagement. The guidelines derive inspiration from faith teachings and are structured around the principles of seeking impartiality and transparency, building trust and mutual respect and finding common ground.

63. Religious institutions and faith-based organizations are often uniquely placed to reach the most vulnerable children. In the Central African Republic, UNICEF collaborated on a platform of religious confessions to support religious communities in providing more comprehensive and sustainable solutions to the crisis facing the country. UNICEF has engaged with religious organizations, such as the Christian Council of Ghana and the Muslim Council of Ghana, to promote key behaviour relating to health, nutrition, education, child protection, hygiene and sanitation. UNICEF has also worked in collaboration with female traditional leadership in the country. The Council for Women Traditional Leaders, which is the umbrella body for the Queen Mothers, has been actively working to promote key behaviour relating to child survival, development and protection. UNICEF works together with the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia to mobilize religious leaders from the Christian and Muslim faiths to ensure that they have accurate information about Ebola transmission, response and recovery to impart to their communities. In Mozambique, UNICEF conducted the first training of trainers for almost 100 influential religious leaders in high-priority provinces. Religious leaders developed further training plans to target leaders at the district level and social mobilization plans at the community level.

64. For UNAIDS, intercultural and interreligious dialogue are central components in the design and delivery of public health measures. In 2014, it convened faith-based service providers to share models of faith-based HIV service delivery models in six high-burden countries. In the same year, it partnered with the We Will Speak Out coalition in a high-level ministerial dialogue held in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as part of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. Ministers, senior faith leaders, representatives of faith-based organizations and other NGOs discussed the role of faith leaders and faith-based organizations in tackling sexual violence and ways to enhance collaboration

between key actors. The year also marked the launch of the first-ever Zero Discrimination Day, 1 March, in favour of a consolidated global movement of solidarity to end discrimination and enable all people to lead a life of dignity.

65. Efforts to respond to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa demonstrated that full community engagement and cooperation not only is indispensable in public health emergency, but also can be assured only if public health messaging is prepared and delivered with cultural and religious sensitivity. UNAIDS worked in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO) to develop new, culturally sensitive practices for the burial of actual or suspected Ebola victims to eliminate risky behaviour associated with high levels of transmission of Ebola.

66. In this regard, the protocol, entitled "How to conduct a safe and dignified burial of a patient who has died from suspected or confirmed Ebola virus", was developed by an interdisciplinary team from WHO and UNAIDS, in partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and faith-based organizations, including the World Council of Churches, Islamic Relief, Caritas Internationalis and World Vision, and issued in November 2014. In addition, recommendations from a team of medical anthropologists on meaningful and safe alternatives for touching and bathing dead bodies were developed from consultations with religious leaders in affected countries and research into the cultural significance and values of traditional burial practices in affected countries. The protocol was implemented by burial teams, managed by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, ministries of health and an NGO consortium, in collaboration with local religious leaders and families.

67. Removing barriers to women's participation at all levels, providing equal opportunities, and creating a culture of zero tolerance for violence against women can help to achieve a culture of peace. UN-Women promoted intercultural and interfaith dialogue on the day of intergenerational dialogue (13 March), highlighting the need to reclaim faith-based organizations as advocates for social justice and non-discrimination rather than forces of conservatism and the fact that women of faith should be able to claim their human rights rather than have to choose between rights and faith. Male representatives of faith-based organizations also called for increased support for sexual and reproductive health and rights and bodily integrity, including support for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

68. In Zimbabwe, UN-Women worked with World Vision towards changing religious perceptions and doctrines that perpetuate violence against women. UN-Women is also supporting a civil society organization to strengthen the capacity of traditional leaders to implement strategies combating negative social norms such as early or forced marriage. In the Pacific region, UN-Women supports partnerships between Governments, faith-based organizations and civil society to advance laws and policies to end violence against women. In Fiji, for example, the Anglican Church implemented a policy of zero tolerance for violence against women, with strong leadership by the House of Sarah, which received a UN-Women Pacific Fund grant. These efforts resulted in increased support services for the prevention of violence against women, greater awareness by church leaders and clergy of gender equality and the integration of gender equality into the Anglican school curriculum.

69. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) works closely with faith leaders in raising awareness regarding human trafficking and in supporting its victims. UNODC participates in the Santa Marta Group, an alliance of international

police chiefs and bishops from around the world who work with civil society to eradicate human trafficking and modern-day slavery. In December 2014, UNODC contributed to discussions resulting in an international joint declaration of religious leaders against modern slavery. It also collaborates with faith-based organizations in the delivery of technical assistance. For example, in 2015, UNODC worked with both the Islamic Council and the Christian Council in training national actors in the Gambia.

70. The Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide is leading an initiative to engage religious leaders from various faiths and religions to take action to counter incitement to violence that could lead to genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. This initiative is one of his priorities, since the escalation of tensions among communities that include different religions or beliefs in recent years has often been accompanied by incitement to violence using religion as a justification.

71. In April 2015, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, in cooperation with the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue and the Government of Morocco, organized the first of a series of forums with religious leaders in Fez, Morocco. It brought together 26 representatives of religions and beliefs and resulted in a plan of action for religious leaders to prevent incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

72. **Around the world, prejudice, intolerance, racism, xenophobia, discrimination, extremism, radicalization and extreme violence are extant and manifold, and complex patterns of State breakdown, wars and civil conflicts are continuing to surface. Migration and human displacement are growing, and their causes are multiplying. Widespread deficits in social justice and in the respect for and exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms continue to present barriers to the realization of human capabilities, choices and opportunities as critical enablers of development. These gaps are reinforced by a lack of credible human rights protection mechanisms anchored in the rule of law and the absence of democratic and accountable governance systems. In addition, unconstitutional changes to authority, terrorism and the role of non-State actors, organized crime and corruption, food prices, the role that social media plays in helping actors to organize and climate change further contribute to the growing complexity of conflicts across the world.**

73. **Often, a combination of the aforementioned dynamics is at play and, in most instances, identity — whether religious, cultural, ethnic or other — is used for further polarization across and within communities. In such a way, diversity and difference are often seized as sources of contention and fear. As many of these challenges know no national or regional boundaries, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Governments or local leaders to protect their citizens and achieve their country's or community's potential without concerted international action.**

74. **Moving beyond such broad dynamics, there are some specific challenges to working in the intercultural and interreligious dialogue field. The reporting**

period has been marked by a clear and rapid prevalence of radicalization and violent extremism, which has been reflected in the increased prioritization given to these issues throughout the United Nations system. The high incidence of atrocity crimes and escalation in tensions among communities of different religions or beliefs in recent years has often been accompanied by incitement to violence that moreover uses religion and belief as its justification. This points to further investment on the part of States in building the capacity of religious leaders and religious institutions to be effectively involved in mediation, in identifying risk of conflicts, in managing and resolving conflicts and in preventing extremism. In addition, the prevalence of the impunity that many States are experiencing or have experienced in conflict allows war crimes and serious human rights violations to thrive, which ultimately undermines the fabric of societies, feeds instability and prevents the development of durable solutions.

75. Ensuring respect for and the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms provides the cornerstone of efforts towards a rapprochement of cultures. The International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures 2013-2022 was born of the need to strengthen the linkages between cultural diversity and universal values, as well as enhance dialogue between cultures based on dignity, tolerance and respect. As the basis of human coexistence, human rights principles are not unique to any one culture, belief or ideology, and unite all cultures in a common humanity.

76. Longer-term peace and lasting development cannot be achieved without a sustained attention to governance, which continues to be beset at both the national and local levels, resulting in recurring cycles of deadlock and conflict. At the same time, not all differences and conflicts in a society can be managed by external mediators or peacekeepers. National capacities for managing conflict and for building dialogue are as vital as a revived economy or infrastructure. Conducting wider civil dialogue and building effective and sustainable capacities for conflict prevention and resolution at the national and local levels are measures that contribute to the transformation of governance institutions.

77. United Nations entities stress that the inclusive participation of a range of stakeholders is vital to achieving peaceful societies and ensuring effective and durable development processes. Societies that are resilient to violent conflict are those in which different groups can constructively and systematically address potential causes of tension. Such societies have State, local and community institutions that can work together, network and deal with political challenges in an inclusive and peaceful manner. Numerous efforts towards rebuilding the social fabric within and between communities have been launched to prevent potential fissures. To that end, engaging faith-based and non-governmental organizations has been instrumental to such efforts.

78. Monitoring and evaluation are necessary in order to measure the progress achieved, better support programming and navigate the best way forward. As the responsibility of monitoring often resides within Member States, there is a potential to explore mechanisms that better support policymaking and evaluation, to expand cooperation in the framework of the International

Decade in order to involve a wider range of actors and stakeholders, and to develop special initiatives to support its strategic goals.

79. **With the scale of challenges evident worldwide and the limited space in which to act, it is also critical that human and financial resources are matched to the scope of the challenges at hand. In order to act effectively and with sufficient speed to prevent and address conflicts, more resources are needed, and capacity-building initiatives should be increased.**

80. **Since much of the work done to prevent violent identity-based conflict is behind closed doors, strategic communication should be reinforced at the United Nations system level to make the results of such work more visible. Awareness-raising activities should be envisaged to boost the Decade's public profile, and innovative measures should be taken to get the message across around the world and notably to young people.**

81. **Today, the United Nations system needs to adequately respond to the increasingly complex challenges that the world is facing by recognizing that people are being brought together in ways that were unimaginable when the United Nations was created. Adapting to current trends, aligning strategies and supporting the work adequately will prove crucial for the effectiveness and credibility of the United Nations work in this area. In the context of the upcoming agreement on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which will guide the global development agenda beyond 2015, achieving a culture of peace and strengthening intercultural and interreligious dialogue has never been as important as it is today.**